EXPLORING THE CHRISTIAN WORLD MIND

PERSONAL INTERVIEWS — THE UNITED NATIONS COMMUNITY

DAVID WESLEY SOPER

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THE ROMAN POINT OF VIEW

JACQUES MARITAIN

It was not easy for M. Maritain to arrange to see me, for his mornings were devoted to research and writing, whence have come his distinguished contributions. His evenings were occupied with crowded appointments. Calls upon the then French Ambassador to the Vatican were numerous. Nonetheless, with the assistance of the enchanting secretary, Mlle. Sylvain, the interview was set for four-fifteen.

A drawing room was selected for our conversation in Rome's Palazzo Taverna, and an obsequious butler placed me in comfort beside a great vase of flowers. A moment later His Excellency, M. Jacques Maritain, entered, took my hand cordially, and seated himself at my side. With the kindliest grace he considered and answered my queries. He expressed his pleasure that our mutual friend, Nicholas Berdiaeff, had urged me to visit him.

I had prepared my spirit for the interview by spending a while at the Vatican, where, through the advocacy of my friend, Don Carlo Carbone, Roman priest and professor of religious art, I was received with other pilgrims by His Holiness, Pope Pius XII. I confess that I was deeply moved as I gazed upon the spare figure and kindly face of Peter's direct successor. The ecstatic shouts of the pilgrims increased my emotion. The Pope gave us his blessing, directed bliss also to our families, urged that we take our problems directly to God in prayer. I was reminded, during the delivery of these good words, of a Roman friend who once said to me: "I believe in praying to the saints, but I have so little time for daily devotions that, when I pray, I take my petitions straight to Headquarters."

The mediaeval and heraldic colour of the Vatican, its magnificence in structure and beauty, and the unequalled glory of its

artistic masterpieces, constitute an incomparable monument to the Faith of Augustine, Francis, Thomas, and Dante. Outside the Vatican, and in striking contrast to the prodigal splendour of Rome's ancient ruins, was the appalling poverty of the people. I was impressed too that Rome's innumerable billboards seemed devoted exclusively to the advertisement of quick "V. D." cures. Sorokin's principle of polarization — glory and shame existing side by side — was clearly illustrated; Vatican and venereal disease, the one seeking to redeem man's spirit, the other seeking to destroy his flesh, competed for attention; there the Roman Church and the International Black Market had their rival headquarters.

M. Maritain had long fascinated me, for his name had been often mentioned at Lynn Harold Hough's Graduate Seminar at Drew University. In pursuing my own later studies I had frequently consulted his penetrating volumes, Roman in idea, broadly Catholic in spirit.

On many occasions the apparently irreconcilable philosophies of Thomas Aquinas and Kierkegaard had evoked in me a keen desire to find a basis for reconciliation. At once therefore I asked whether these two thought structures, the one characteristic of Romanism, the other of Protestantism, might not be harmonized. M. Maritain immediately declared that, in his estimation, Kierkegaard was not a philosopher but a hero of faith, a true mystic. There was no sufficient reason to consider the opposed positions irreconcilable. Between Thomism and the Existentialism of Heidegger and Sartre there was an unbridgeable chasm, for Thomism could not peacefully be wedded to irrationalism. Yet between the Existentialism of Kierkegaard and Gabrielle Marcel and the philosophy of Thomas there was much common ground.

Jacques Maritain mentioned that a new book of his was then in process of publication in France dealing precisely with what he regarded as a strong element of Existentialism in Thomas Aquinas. It was assumed by various writers that the Scholasticism of Thomas had been focused, in true Greek fashion, not upon existence but upon essence. After careful research M. Maritain had come to the conclusion, unlike Gilson, that this popular assumption was false. The mentality of Thomas had been a

preoccupation with the problems of existing individuals. It had been existence, not essence, with which Thomas had been primarily concerned. Hence, the basis for reconciliation between Thomism and Existentialism already existed in the former.

We might have pressed the question further. In particular I would have asked concerning the specific divergence between the two conceptions of living Christianity. Thomism appeared preoccupied with the objective, Kierkegaard with the subjective Church. In one the structure of Christian thought and faith was *there*, so to speak, for anyone to take or leave. In the other only the subjective crisis of faith, the passion of personal consecration, was significant. Was the Church to be considered *outside* or *inside* the believer—or both, and which primarily? It was not possible to pursue this topic further, for I had promised Mlle. Sylvain that I would not trespass upon later appointments previously scheduled. Had this discussion been extended, I imagine that the Kierkegaardian subjectivity would, in M. Maritain's opinion, have been classified as the Thomist doctrine of personal discipleship, merely one idea in the total cluster of Christian Truths. The essential priority of Roman objectivity would probably have prevailed. However, M. Maritain must in no way be held responsible for this projection of my own imagination. His conclusion might have been that Kierkegaardian subjectivism had been the rediscovery of Roman personal experience.

It is to be recognized that in M. Maritain's rejection of the Existentialism of Heidegger and Sartre as "irrational," the standpoint of rationalism was, by inference, assumed. With a pure rationalism is not Kierkegaardian Existentialism equally at war? It is possible that the problem is unsolvable, since the fundamental presuppositions of the two philosophies are so distinct. Perhaps Protestantism must be forever freedom, subjectivism, or lose one reason for separate existence from Rome. It must be borne in mind, however, that subjectivism is by no means the whole of Protestantism, for classical Protestantism had also an objective Faith, the Biblical testimony to Christ as God and Saviour, and an objective Church, governed not by papal decree but by parliamentary agreement.

As the second subject for discussion I quoted Arnold J. Toynbee's assertion, emphasized in the second three of his many volume *Study of History*, that Christendom might still be a unity, and the deification of parochial sovereign States have been avoided, had the Popes of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries accepted the parliamentary limitation upon their absolute authority offered by the Conciliar Movement. M. Maritain had not heard the Toynbee statement, and gave it some consideration. From the viewpoint of an historian, he said, the assertion in question was undoubtedly true. However, Toynbee had failed to take into account the nature of the Roman Church, viewed from within. Only recently the Pope had characterized civil government as legitimately receiving its authority from men, whereas the government of the Church had received its authority from God. The two kinds of government were basically distinct; no proper analogy could be drawn between them. The root difficulty in the fifteenth and subsequent centuries had been the erroneous belief of the mediaeval dynasties that they ruled by Divine Right. The fact was otherwise, for the monarchs had in no case received their authority from God; they had rather seized it by force out of the hands of the people. The Pope, as the Representative of Christ, had not received his authority from men. He had not been at liberty to bestow his power upon an ecclesiastical Parliament. To a limited degree, the parliamentary principle existed in practice within the Roman Church in the Pope's appointed College of Cardinals, a kind of President's Cabinet.

From this pointed summary of a characteristic Roman position, our discussion led to a related problem. Exactly what was necessary for the re-union of Christendom? Evangelical Protestants, by virtue of their faith in Christ as God and Saviour, recognized a basic common ground with Rome; at times these Christians felt themselves isolated in a vast throng of doubting Thomases. Among leaders, I stated, the idea had been advanced that Protestant denominations, Unitarians not excluded, might be received into parliamentary Fellowship, acknowledging the Pope as the Symbol of Roman authoritarian unity, but permitted, like the Franciscans, the Dominicans, and the Jesuits, to retain their own Regula and their characteristic emphases in faith. M. Maritain replied that

the reunion of Christendom could materialize only on the basis of agreement—first, on the essentials of the Creed, second, on the authority of the Pope to decide disputed issues of faith and order. If the Pope relinquished his absolute power and became merely Christendom's permanent Presiding Officer, Rome would no longer be Rome, and the Christian Faith itself might conceivably be voted out of existence by a parliamentary majority.

I wrote these paragraphs, in first draft, at the Basilica of San Paolo on the Ostian Road south of Rome. Near the spot St. Paul was beheaded; under the high altar of the Great Church, it is believed, his body lies buried. It is significant that St. Paul received his call, his gospel, and his authority, on the Damascus Road, directly from Christ, not from St. Peter—in the view of the author of the *Acts of the Apostles*, probably Luke, and in his own emphasis on the primacy of personal justifying faith. He began and ended his great ministry "outside Rome." Verily if Romanism is the Church of St. Peter, Protestantism, it would seem, is the Church of St. Paul. And, as a matter of history, did not St. Paul make a considerable contribution to Roman theology?

We came at last to the topic of major immediate interest. It might seem at first that the question of Protestant resurrection ought to be asked only of non-Romans, but a Voice is always needed from an external perspective. M. Maritain believed, he said, that two outstanding needs existed in contemporary Protestantism, one a recovery of what the Quakers called "The Inner Light"—prayer and faith and devotion of an exalted kind, true Life within—the other an escape from this generation's all-embracing, and all-dissolving, pseudo-social gospel, through an intellectual revival. America's Drew University, in particular, M. Maritain asserted, offered an excellent example of the necessary intellectual renaissance, a reaction against sentimentality. A conscious companionship with God, which, as a matter of history, was a central emphasis in classical Protestantism, and the intellectual seriousness of the Great Reformers—these were the definitive Protestant necessities.

W. A. Visser 'T Hooft's emphasis upon a return to original Protestantism is similar, though distinct in its ascription of final

authority to the Word of God rather than the interpreting Church. Similar also is the demand from Emil Brunner that "a live theology" be recovered.

At length we came to practical politics. Exactly how far to the political left might a man go who found himself at the theological right? There was no identity whatever, asserted Maritain, between a theological and a political right. He had stressed in all his writings, particularly in the volume, *True Humanism,* which he recommended as the strongest presentation of his ethical and political philosophy, that classical Christianity was neutral about political mechanics; it simply required responsible solutions to social problems. His position in matters political, he acknowledged, was virtually identical with that of Reinhold Niebuhr and Nicholas Berdiaeff. Christianity required group mobilization of resources and energies to meet group needs. Totalitarianism's coercive Collectivism annihilated the spirit and the identity of the individual, ruled by irresponsible caprice, proved a government of brigands. Laissez-faire Anarchy, however, turned of necessity into a regime of force and fraud, of violence and hypocrisy. The Christian Community, on the other hand, rallied the human and the mechanical best for a common assault against common obstacles to social and personal well-being.

Because Protestantism in the main, he said, had regarded the political world as beyond the claim of the Gospel, it had allowed the State to become secular. The ensuing moral anarchy had brought forth many things, but little notably based on Christian charity. Christianity, to obey its Lord, to express its true nature, had to move back into the political world, claiming all for Christ, demanding the execution of the Divine will in Society as in the Church and the Soul.

ETIENNE GILSON

At M. Gilson's home in Paris a kindly woman in middle age led me to a handsome living room. Presently a young man of nineteen appeared and explained that his father had gone to the Senat, where I would be sure to find him. It was not known whether he would dine at home.

I asked the son if I might interview him. After several protestations of inability to shed light on difficult problems, he consented. He spoke very acceptable English, and proved as stimulating of mind as he was handsome in appearance. He had begun his first year at the Sorbonne, where he had enrolled in standard Liberal Arts courses. He hoped eventually to specialize in philosophy, his father's field. Among his teachers was M. Jean Wall, whose interest in Kierkegaard had been described to me by Madame Gabrielle Marcel, during a breakfast conversation at Madame Chessex' in the French Swiss Alps.

The name of the younger Gilson was a revelation of his father's intellectual affections, and a short history of the Golden Age of Romanism, Bernard François Dominique.

Bernard Gilson had heard of Kierkegaard, but M. Jean Wall had not as yet lectured on the Danish Jeremiah in his classes. I related M. Jacques Maritain's answers to my queries concerning the present break between Protestantism and Romanism. The fault, Maritain had declared, had lain with the false concept of the Divine Right of Kings. I quoted Toynbee's view that an unbending papal absolutism had been the cause of the cleavage. Bernard Gilson regarded Toynbee's comment, and Dostoyevsky's criticism of Romanism as a continuation in religious form of the Roman Empire, as unjustified.

Bernard spoke to the theme of Protestant-Roman reunion with fine insight. There was important common ground between the two Communions, he acknowledged, particularly where Protestants continued to believe in the Deity of Christ. Creedal unanimity was thus reasonably established. Nonetheless, it was not possible, in his estimation, for reunion to materialize in view of wide divergence on the Sacraments. He considered this the most important disagreement. On this issue papal authority had been rejected by Protestants. Before reunion could occur, the Pope's right to decide disputed questions would have to be duly acknowledged. On the other hand, he could see no reason why the parliamentary principle might not be admitted into the administration of the Roman Church, provided only that the superior authority of the Pope were preserved.

Bernard Gilson did not feel competent to discuss the problems of Protestantism, but listened interestedly, and with apparent sympathy, to my outline of M. Maritain's suggestion—urging a renewal of spiritual and intellectual seriousness. Thinking politically, Bernard believed classical Christianity could approve any regime which sought to apply Christian charity in common sense solutions to social problems. He considered, he said, that even a dictatorship was not necessarily alien to Christian purposes, provided it respected the integrity of the individual. On this point, he acknowledged, there might be considerable debate. In any case he was convinced that social and economic democracy were of the very structure and spirit of classical Christianity.

At the dinner hour Bernard Gilson seemed loath to discontinue our interview. However, lest I miss his father at the Conseil de la Republique, I left at once. My taxi transported me through the rain to the French Senat, but the efficient effort of a secretary to locate M. Etienne Gilson in the halls or in the restaurant of the great building disclosed only that he had just departed.

Following dinner at my hotel I phoned to ascertain whether M. Gilson was free to receive me. In accordance with his gracious invitation I returned at nine o'clock. Etienne Gilson himself answered the bell, and ushered me at once into his study. It had been a long day; I had returned from Rome in the morning, after two nights and a day on the Simplon Orient Express; I had attended an afternoon lecture on Montaigne at the Sorbonne; I was weary in body and mind. After the stimulating evening with M. Gilson, however, who proved both a friendly conversationalist and a magnanimous host, I felt as refreshed as though a new day had begun.

M. Gilson agreed with Maritain that the Danish Pascal, Kierkegaard, had been truly a hero of faith, a mystic, but believed him also an important Christian philosopher; he had been the first in any significant degree to turn the Socratic dialectic to Christian account. There was greater similarity between Bernard and Kierkegaard, at the point of Christian inwardness, than between Thomas and the Dane.

Etienne Gilson was intrigued by Maritain's idea, as I reported it, that Thomas' philosophy had been basically existential. From

his own viewpoint, however, the problem of essence was inevitably prior to that of existence. He acknowledged, nonetheless, wide similarity of content between Maritain and himself. A new book of his own, in process of publication, he explained, specifically re-defined the problem of being.

I mentioned to M. Gilson that his volume, *The Spirit Of Mediaeval Philosophy,* had been introduced by Edwin Lewis to his classes at Drew University with admiration and affection. He was pleased at this tribute from a major American theologian, and amused when I informed him that Stanley Romaine Hopper, also of Drew, in his striking volume, *The Crisis Of Faith,* had suggested a strong tie between the Gilson philosophy and the neo-Plotinian mysticism of Bernard and the Victorines. He regarded it an honor, he said, to be called a neo-Plotinian.

We might at this point have discussed the desire, among mystics, to rise into the ecstasy of the Divine Embrace without passing through the crisis of repentance, and, as well, the tendency, after the manner of Hinduism, to look upon the Ojective of the Christian Pilgrimage as Union rather than as Fellowship with God. These elements in neo-Plotinianism Stanley R. Hopper has examined with critical penetration.

Seeking my host's opinion, I outlined Arnold J. Toynbee's discussion of fifteenth century papal intractability as the determining cause of the Reformation and its end product, Nationalism. M. Gilson spoke of the theme with magnanimity of mind. Toynbee's statement was unquestionably true, he said, yet it was necessary to consider exactly how the inclusion of the parliamentary principle would have affected the Roman Church. Had the parliamentary modification been accepted, Romanism would have assumed the fissiparous character of Protestantism. Beyond any doubt the Roman Church was an Absolute Despotism, asserted Gilson. It could not escape authoritarianism, if it were faithful to its Divine Commission. On a recent visit to the Vatican, M. Gilson had been impressed, he said, by the sheer Despotism of the Holy See. "Nobody had any authority except the Pope and his secretary." Yet if papal absolutism had been replaced by a Roman parliament, the Church undoubtedly would have undergone Protestantism's

protean change. Authoritarian unity had given objective continuity to Roman Christianity, and saved it from anarchic disintegration. Nonetheless, M. Gilson acknowledged, the Reformation had swept away many abuses in the Roman Church, malpractices which had merited all the criticism they had received.

It was not to be understood that Christian thought possessed no living continuity of its own. On the contrary, the continuity of the Christian tradition had risen through an inevitable recognition of common convictions. Papal authority, however, had served admirably as a unifying force, a common court of appeal, without which the unity of tradition might, conceivably, have been shattered.

I called attention in some detail to Dostoyevsky's criticism, expressed in all his works, but perhaps most strongly in *The Idiot* and *The Brothers Karamazov,* that the Roman Church had accepted the political sword which Christ rejected in the Third Temptation. M. Gilson expressed his appreciation for Dostoyevsky. However, in his opinion, one had to decide whether or not Christ meant to influence the government of this world. If He did not intend to eliminate political evils in the here and now, Rome was wrong in her effort throughout history to make His influence felt realistically in the total life of succeeding generations. On the other hand, if Christ did mean that His will be executed on earth as in Heaven, Rome was right in her perpetual endeavor to enclose the State within the Church.

I reminded M. Gilson of the Protestant distinction between an influence exerted upon political life by Christian criticism and counsel, and the divergent influence brought to bear through political intrigue. He recognized this distinction, and freely acknowledged the moral hazard involved in the exercise of political power, but inclined to the view that, if policies were judged by their purposes, and if political power were recognized as properly subordinate to spiritual power, Rome's historic participation in European politics had been entirely defensible. Roman political involvement had been inescapably necessary, for without papal leadership the nations had proven themselves sheep without a shepherd.

What basic hindrances thwarted Protestant-Roman reunion? I asked. M. Gilson replied that Papacy, Sacraments, and Creed were issues of significance. However, in his estimation, the determining divergence appeared in distinct definitions of the Church. To Protestants, the Church was Christ in the individual—a subjective matter, while to Romans the Church itself was Christ—an objective affair. Protestants returned to the Bible and would have no intermediate authority. As a volume for devotional reading, the Bible served admirably without authoritative interpretation. But if a Protestant asked questions as he read, he could not but feel himself alone in his attempt to find convincing answers. A Roman recognized that he was not alone, that the Church, the contemporary Christ, had made and continued to make competent interpretations, informing him reliably concerning the true meaning of passages in question. In the Roman Communion the final authority in Biblical interpretation was the contemporary Church, centered in the Papacy. In Protestant Communions the final authority was the individual—hence Protestantism's intellectual variety, or, if you preferred, anarchy. The objective, and the subjective Church—this constituted the yawning gulf between Christendom's two halves; how indeed could another than a Parliamentary bridge be constructed across the chasm?

It would not be accurate, obviously, to describe Romanism as without subjective faith. Similarly, it would not be accurate to describe Protestantism as without an objective Church. Protestant Articles of Faith, constructed of classical Christianity, whether or not alive in the minds of pastors and people, are certainly objective, and Protestant administrative organizations objective as well. The World Council of Churches, at Amsterdam and New Delhi, now representing 192 denominations, and 300,000,000 members of Christian Churches, with 50,000,000 in Russian dominated countries, has united a vast Parliament with free personal Commitment. Yet it is true that the unmistakable foundation of Romanism is papal and authoritarian, of Protestantism personal and libertarian.

Speaking to the theme of Protestant renewal, M. Gilson felt that the main problem was a decision one way or the other about Christianity. Was Protestantism determined to serve Christianity,

or some other religion of its own invention? If it decided against Christianity, it could then comfortably forbear Evangelism; if for Christianity, its Evangelism would have to be of renewed intensity. Christianity could not escape being Evangelistic; when it had ceased to be Evangelistic, it had ceased to be Christian. A straightforward return to Christian theology, and an equally unashamed return to great zeal in pressing the Christian invitation to pagan societies and pagan souls—these were obvious Protestant needs. A recovery of Evangelism could not come to pass until there first occurred a recovery of the Christian Faith.

Politically speaking, there was nothing in Christianity to prevent Christians from voting as Socialists. In M. Gilson's estimation, Christianity was politically neutral; it sought only a Christian use of existing political machinery. Christianity could have no common ground with Marxian materialism, nor with Marxian class antagonism, nor with Marxian totalitarianism, yet the clear meaning of Christian charity was social responsibility. Only irresponsibility would allow common economic injustices to continue unchecked. Nations in straitened postwar circumstances could not afford lawless raids upon their slender stores. Social controls, even with the hazards involved, were obvious necessities. Moderate Socialism, with personal freedom, was simply an intelligent facing of reality.

I mentioned that I planned to interview Christopher Dawson and C. S. Lewis. Etienne Gilson expressed profound admiration for both writers, showing me their books on his shelves. He regarded Lewis a pure theologian. He asked me to convey his affectionate greeting to Dawson, whom he considered one of mankind's greater historians.

CHRISTOPHER DAWSON

Perhaps it is the influence of geography on ideas, but England has long proven that it is at a distance from Rome. Even Romanism in England is English, notably modified from the French, and even more from the Italian. Christopher Dawson's inclusiveness of perspective, his critical honesty, are impressive. He writes and speaks like a particularly literate and particularly liberal Protestant.

There is no slavishness toward papal authority, no nicely preserved lip service, rather a deep affection, formed in freedom, for the living symbol of Roman Union. He thinks of Christ as Lord and Pope as Servant. As he suggested, there are at least two Catholicisms, one centered in the Vatican, the other centered in Christ.

Christina Dawson, his daughter, received me at the lovely home on Boars Hill, west of Oxford, and provided me at my request with her father's book, *The Judgment of The Nations.* She placed me in a deck chair on the south terrace, overlooking the lawn and the roses, to await the return of her father and mother from an interview with Mr. Sheed, the New York publisher. Christina was engaged in packing, for the family was off on the morrow to holiday in Devonshire. I offered to "sit on the lid" with my two hundred and four pounds, but Christina explained, smiling with great charm, that many items were yet to be assembled before the cases could be closed. I described my visit in Paris with Etienne Gilson and his son, Bernard. With fine thoughtfulness, she grasped at once the solution to Bernard's problem of a place in Oxford for future study, giving me the name and address of a French student center at the University.

Mrs. Dawson graciously invited me to tea. The restfulness of the hour of family fellowship was most welcome, for I had reached Oxford from London at four in the morning and had risen at eight to begin the full day.

When Christopher Dawson led me to his private study, a meeting of minds had already taken place; it was possible forthwith to begin the serious interview. I therefore asked: "Can a parliamentary bridge be constructed across the chasm separating Roman objectivism from Protestant subjectivism?" In Mr. Dawson's *The Judgment Of The Nations* I had noted considerable emphasis on the prior necessity of unified spiritual leadership if political and economic peace were to become realities. Christianity's Universal Church had created Western Civilization (Dawson and Toynbee were of one mind); only a Universal Church could save Europe from Nationalism. He had urged unity not only among Protestants but also between Protestantism and

Romanism, secondarily in organization, primarily in common consciousness of the Kingship of Christ. Perhaps the fissiparous trend in Christendom had run its course.

Mr. Dawson at once declared that Roman Christianity could not be described as purely objective. Had there not been any number of mystics in the Roman Communion, men of the stature of Thomas A. Kempis? I was reminded that both Susanah and John Wesley had read *The Imitation Of Christ* from childhood, that the same classic had been my own spiritual mainstay. Surely Christian inwardness was not exclusively Protestant. Mr. Dawson asserted that Protestantism was not merely subjective; the Ecumenical movement clearly evidenced a strong desire for objective unity.

Kierkegaardian subjectivism had not been typically Protestant, in Dawson's opinion. It had been against the objectivism of the Danish Established Church that Kierkegaard had revolted, as Wesley had revolted, in an earlier day, against the Anglican Establishment.

In support of my characterization of the Roman Church as basically objective, I quoted Gilson's statement to me: "The Church to a Protestant is Christ in the individual; to a Roman the Church itself is Christ." I quoted also Gilson's remark that the papacy was a sheer despotism, and the assertion of Pius XII, reported by Maritain in Rome, that civil authority came from the people, but papal authority from God. Briefly I narrated the amusing reply of a Roman cameo salesman to my question about Italian Communism: "There is very little Communism in Italy. We Italians are all Christians; we believe in the Pope — and religion, in that order." Mr. Dawson smiled at the anecdote, but regarded the papacy a necessary symbol of a unified Christendom, as England's Kings or Queens were wholesome symbols of a unified Empire. This characterization served to underscore the divergence between the nominal authority of a British monarch and the absolutism of the Vatican, and afforded me the opportunity to cite Toynbee's argument that the fifteenth century papal rejection of parliamentary authority had provoked the so-called Reformation. Mr. Dawson was convinced that Toynbee, with whom as historian and philos-

opher he has so much in common, had over-simplified the pre-Reformation problem. In Dawson's opinion, irrationalism and revolution had been seething everywhere among the people; these explosive forces had shattered Christian unity.

And what, I asked, of Dostoyevsky's attack on Romanism as the acceptance of the political sword rejected by Christ? Mr. Dawson suggested that *The Grand Inquisitor* in *The Brothers Karamazov* could be interpreted as an attack not upon Romanism but rather upon Nihilism. In his view, Dostoyevsky had been reaching out for a genuine Christian philosophy. I reminded him that in *The Idiot* the attack upon Rome had been specific, and by name: Romanism's political intrigues, according to the Russian thinker, had made atheists or protestants of all honest men. Yes, said Dawson correctly, but *The Karamazovs* had been a later work. Still, said I, even in *The Karamazovs* you had Ivan's vigorous statement: "The Church must not become the State (that is, priests must not rule), but the State must become the Church (responsive to the Church's moral leadership)." I mentioned that this idea seemed not far removed from T. S. Eliot's *The Idea of a Christian Society,* nor from Dawson's own statement, in *The Judgment Of The Nations:* "The God-State has been the greatest Enemy of God."

The Roman Church, said Christopher Dawson, had not wielded the political sword; even in the Inquisition persons condemned by the Church had been handed over to civil authorities for punishment. And one should never lose sight of the two Romanisms, the uncritical and the critical. Throughout the history of the Church there had always been critics, like Dante, articulate in opposition to papal military ventures. Dante had not hesitated in *The Divine Comedy* to consign immoral popes to the Inferno, yet he had never questioned papal authority in matters of Faith.

Maritain, I reported, had asserted that the Protestant Reformation had been evoked by the false idea of the Divine Right of Kings. In Dawson's estimation, there had been something wholesome in the notion of the Divine right of kings—at least the recognition that all authority had come from God. Mr. Dawson had been impressed, he said, by the British Coronation Service,

preserved from the centuries. George VI and Elizabeth II had thus received their authority from God by consecration to His will, had indeed actually received the Crown from the Church, had accepted their responsibility as Defenders of the Faith.

There seemed little possibility of harmony between Protestant insistence upon parliamentary power, and Roman insistence upon papal absolutism. Complete agreement existed only in the common conception of the Church as Mediator of the moral Love of God, of ethical seriousness, to societies and souls.

What of the Protestant idea, I enquired, that Christ's Church was one Great Tree of Faith, with many legitimate Branches? Mr. Dawson was pleased that this unifying idea existed among Protestants. Christ, he said, was clearly the Trunk or Root of the Tree of Life. However, the Roman communion's idea seemed defensible that throughout its numerous national Churches and its various Orders, Franciscan, Dominican, Jesuit, and the like, it constituted the Entire Tree. To Roman folk, Protestantism seemed a Growth of a different kind.

If Mr. Dawson's expressed idea be accepted, that Christ, as God and Man, is the Basis of Union in Christendom, are not Protestant Churches, committed nominally and actually to one or another interpretation of this Faith, necessarily Branches of the legitimate Tree? The argument could be carried further. For example, if the Kingship of Christ is accepted as the Basis of union, what hinders the membership of the Roman Church in the parliamentary World Council of Churches? The Ecumenical organization uniformly receives into its fellowship any denomination willing to confess its "faith in Christ as God and Saviour"? Indeed, this would seem the simpler path to Christian reunion. A Pope of adventurous disposition might in truth make exactly this brave crossing of the Rubicon, thereby proving himself, in one magnanimous deed, "the Servant of the Servants of Christ."

What counsel, I enquired, would Christopher Dawson give to Protestants seeking the renewal of central Christianity in their midst? My own Methodism, I reported, had been described with superficial justification as a mere crusade for Prohibition and Pacifism—neither a bad idea. As a parochial student had put it,

not incorrectly: "Due to Methodism, peace was raging throughout the country." American Congregationalism too, it appeared, had not won a decisive victory against autonomous Capitalism. What precisely was to be done to re-invigorate Christianity in Protestantism? Mr. Dawson expressed his regret if the deistic substitution of respectability for Christianity had captured American denominations. No simple remedy had been found for theological malnutrition. Perhaps, I suggested, disintegration on the one hand could be countered by integration on the other—what Sorokin calls the "integral" point of view. Serious Christianity would assuredly prove a positive force in a universe of negation. Mr. Dawson believed that new techniques were needed for the Christian re-invigoration of Christendom—of meditation and prayer for individual spiritual renewal, of mass education for intellectual recovery. The Study Retreat had proven effective in both endeavors. Christians thus withdrew from the world for intellectual and spiritual cultivation; they received new vitality of mind and spirit without which religious awakenings had no permanence. This sounded like Maritain's emphasis upon intellectual *and* spiritual renewal, or like Brunner's insistence upon "a live theology." The Study Retreat, I reported, was already widely in use in American Protestantism, particularly among young people, though it could not always have been affirmed that "faith in Christ as God and Saviour," in those terms, had been paramount, or even articulate, at these assemblies. Frequently, to my knowledge, leardership had seemed divided among Autonomists in philosophy, Deists in religion, and Utopianists in politics.

Deism was dominant neither in England nor on the Continent, Mr. Dawson asserted. Few leaders, as far as he knew, had bogged down in the morass of half-belief. Europeans were either Theists and Incarnationists or more concerned with Enquiry than Ontology. No intermediate position had gained respect.

Politically, said Dawson, a classical Christian might go as far left as spiritual freedom would permit. Political machinery, whether of the left or of the right, could be used with moral responsibility and Christian charity for or against the human spirit. Social planning, an intelligent approach to group problems, was not in itself alien to Christian purposes.

Spiritual freedom is indeed the yardstick by which many political, and religious, institutions have been measured and found wanting. I stopped awhile at the foot of Oxford's exquisite monument to the memory of Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer, martyrs for spiritual freedom in Bloody Mary's day. The inscription on the shaft seems of permanent significance:

> To the Glory of God and in Grateful Commemoration of His Servants, Thomas Cranmer, Nicholas Ridley, and Hugh Latimer, Prelates of the Church of England, Who near this spot yielded their bodies to be burned, bearing witness to the sacred Truths which they had affirmed and maintained against the errors of the Church of Rome, and rejoicing that to them it was given not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for His sake, this monument was erected by public subscription in the year of Our Lord MDCCCXLI.

I remembered the man of Oxford whom Queen Elizabeth called "our father Foxe," a lifelong fugitive from bigotry. His classic account, of martyrs tortured by the Roman Empire and the Roman Church, remains documentary evidence that spiritual freedom has not been cheaply achieved.

In any case, it would be hard to find a simpler basis for united spiritual leadership in the modern world than Christopher Dawson's definition of a Christian as a man with faith in Christ, and of the true Church as obedient to Christ as King. If, on these definitions, Protestantism and Romanism cannot meet in brotherly embrace, as Allies in a common cause, there is need for honest searching of the soul; it could only be because one or the other, or both, in point of fact, have substituted some lesser King for Christ. If Roman Christians have made an Idol of the Papal Church, have Protestant Christians made an Idol of the Nationalist State, or, for better or worse, of Individual Opinion? Holy Community would seem a better alternative than Sheer Communism, Sheer Romanism, or Sheer Chaos.

I had heard of G. K. Chesterton, it seemed, all my life, and every idea attributed to him had always informed and amused me at one and the same time, but the first book of his to come into my hands had been *Orthodoxy*. I had found it quite the most hilarious book on serious Christianity I had ever seen, and the hilarity, surprisingly enough, had not been an alien element forcibly incorporated but had risen out of the seriousness itself. I know of no book like it to this day. The paradoxical quality of Chesterton's quick mind, and of his profound thought, had fascinated me. No one ought to be allowed to remain a Churchmember for long without being invited to read him. His basic ideas, and some of his expressions, have continued to impress me. Chesterton, it developed, had not been converted to Christianity by evangelists but by atheists and freethinkers, who had succeeded in arousing in him doubts deeper than their own, namely, doubts of Doubt as a sufficient substitute for Faith. It had dawned upon Chesterton that Christianity, damned from the one side for its supine meekness, and damned with equal vehemence from the other for its crusading and bloodthirsty imperialism, was obviously in the middle of the road. He had discovered that Christianity did not seek to merge all the elements of life into a distinctionless amalgam; rather it raised each element to its own highest pitch and held it from distortion by balancing it with others similarly heightened. It intensified passion, but balanced it with a strengthened control and a spiritual love. It increased man's respect for himself, yet deepened his loathing of his egoism. "Insofar as I am man, I am the chief of creatures; insofar as I am *a* man, I am the chief of sinners." Orthodoxy, in Chesterton's picture, had not been a strait-laced spinster; rather she had been the jovial and kindly and competent mother of a large and lusty family. Orthodoxy, I had learned, was not partiality, for partiality was heresy. Heresy was not belief in something untrue, but belief in something true — a truth, however, wrenched loose from the total cluster of truths and exalted to a monistic absolute, a lonely eminence not properly its own. Paul Elmer More similarly described heresy in *The Demon Of The Absolute*. Orthodoxy was precisely the total cluster of truths in living relationship. "The Church had to be careful, if only that the world might be careless." To have succumbed to any one of the numerous historic heresies, whether Gnosticism with its excessive otherworldliness or Arianism with its excessive thisworldliness, would have been easy. The amazing thing about the Christian Church, as G. K. had put it, was that She had executed the difficult balancing act called Orthodoxy, as She had traveled at break-neck speed through the world, "the dull heresies sprawling on all sides, the wild truth reeling but erect." "It is easy to let the age have its head; the difficult thing is to keep one's own."

The Christ, as G. K. had known Him, with the deep understanding of faith and love, had not been the collected absence, but the collected presence, of vital human emotions. He had been as tender as a child, as meek as a lamb, but, upon occasion, had "flung furniture down the front steps of the Temple." G. K.'s Christ had not been the emaciated "female consumptive" pictured by many painters, but full-blooded and alive, hiding but one thing from His disciples — what G. K. believed to have been "a smile."

Innumerable college students had read G. K.'s volumes at my assignment, and written for the most part wholly admirable essays upon his basic ideas. Invariably the class-room reading of an essay about G. K. had been a red-letter event of rich humor and deep insight, a feast of mind and soul.

With all this in mind, it was unthinkable that I should be in England and not make my pilgrimage to Top Meadow at Beaconsfield, where the great human, the laughing saint, had lived joyously and humbly with Mrs. Chesterton from 1922 till his death in 1936. Dorothy Collins, the secretary, who had waited upon both Mr. and Mrs. G. K. hand and foot for so many years, had joined them there. I had no idea who, or what, I would find, for Mrs. Chesterton had died two years after her husband, and there had been no children.

My journey, however, could not have been better timed, and I must pay a tribute to the remarkable efficiency of my guiding Angel, for I arrived, entirely without advance information, as an annual lecture was being delivered in the single great hall which

had once served as G. K.'s living room, dining room, and bedroom. The lecturer was Dom Ignatius Rice, headmaster of a nearby Catholic Boys' School, the very priest who had received G. K. into the Roman Church. The room was well filled with G. K.'s admirers from far and near. The event was sponsored by the Catholic Aid Society, now operating the Chesterton Home as a refuge and rehabilitation center for converted Protestant clergymen.

G. K.'s courage and humility were emphasized in the lecture. Three humorous stories were narrated, in addition to the familiar one about the telegram to Mrs. Chesterton: "Am in Paddington Station: where ought I to be?" One anecdote concerned a conversation preceding a Chesterton lecture. The chairman, full of advance alibis for the childish queries which might follow the discourse, had said: "I'm afraid the questions which will be asked will be silly, Mr. Chesterton." G. K. had immediately replied: "Not half as silly as my answers. . . ." On another occasion Dom Rice had accompanied G. K. to a lecture platform. When the humorist had risen to speak, he had taken a very small notebook from his vest pocket, opened it with great ostentation, placed it with care on the table before him, and never looked at it again throughout his talk. Furthermore, nothing had been written in the notebook . . . G. K. had once been engaged in a debate with a learned antagonist. After his own first speech, as the scholar had endeavored to present his weighty arguments, G. K. had removed a long carving knife from his coat and, with the attention of the audience fully turned toward him, had leisurely sharpened the point on the tiniest stub of a pencil.

A London friend, Anne Marie Gresham,[1] with the wit and charm of Ireland, explained to me the work of the Catholic Aid Society, and thoughtfully presented me to Dorothy Collins.

Seated by Miss Collins in Top Meadow's sixty-foot living room, with G. K.'s books and pictures about, I sought from her his possible answers to many questions. An attempt to define G. K.'s Catholicism in terms of Thomas Aquinas, Augustine, Erigena, or

1. Read her brief autobiography in our book, *These Found The Way* (Westminster Press).

Pascal seemed to lead precisely nowhere, and perhaps for the obvious reason that G. K.'s Christianity could not otherwise be defined than as Chestertonian. His swing to Romanism had been due simply to what he regarded as the sterility and frustration of an essentially solipsistic Protestantism with its shattering influence upon theological and political community.

What hope, then, if any, would he have seen for a renewal of central Christianity within Protestantism, should a common will exist to produce it? Miss Collins, herself a Roman convert from Anglicanism, was quite sure that G. K. would have seen no hope at all for Protestantism. She cited his reply to the letter of an admirer, who had indicated that Chesterton had converted him to Christianity. G. K. had urged the man to follow him "the whole way" into the Roman Church. I could not but remember G. K.'s characterization of Protestant denominations as "booby-traps," misleading the simple and beguiling the wise either into heresy or anarchy. Protestantism's only hope, Miss Collins was certain, lay in a return to the Roman Fold.

But, I insisted, would not G. K. have had a word of counsel for those who shared his Faith but could not in good conscience share his Church? The anarchic and solipsistic hazards of Protestantism were obvious, I pointed out; yet if in all honesty a genuine Christian believer could not support Roman authoritarianism, would not G. K. have had a message for him? To the Protestant Christian, the hazards of papal despotism were greater than the hazards of democracy.

Miss Collins considered this question a moment, then replied that Protestantism, in her estimation, could have no future unless it could agree about its central beliefs. Through some parliamentary procedure, perhaps like that of the early Councils of Nicea and Chalcydon, Protestantism needed to establish an outline of common convictions. Clearly Protestantism could not survive with neither beliefs nor convictions. Who could preach the absence of an idea? If a Protestant Supreme Court or Ecumenical Council on Theology and Life could be assembled, Protestantism might rediscover its characteristic Ideas, and thus provide the people with an affirmative message. Otherwise, what hope could there be? On

any other basis, the fissiparous process in Protestant theology and in Protestant organization would continue into infinity, if not into absurdity.

I related briefly the story of the World Council of Churches, a fellowship of 112 (now 192) non-Roman denominations, possibly representing a majority of the world's Christians, providing exactly the needed rallying center for Protestantism through its articulate faith in Christ as, in a profound and unique sense, "God and Saviour," accenting the underlining unity in the Holy Spirit of all believers. There could be, after all, but one Church of Christ, and if the Roman Church were shepherding its great part of the One Flock in an authoritarian fashion, non-Roman Catholicism was sheperding its equal or greater part of the same Flock in a parliamentary manner. Miss Collins was not familiar with the World Council, but, as I presented it, believed it a step in the right direction, implying that the second right step would be submission to Rome. She declared that Protestants misunderstood the idea of papal infallibility, a principle which applied to papal decisions upon disputed doctrines, only when such disputes were brought to him for settlement. The last such decision had been given in 1870; appeals were not common occurrences. Any good ship needed a captain, authorized to render final decisions in emergencies. How could a Great Ocean Liner follow more than one Course? . . . If Roman Catholicism can properly be likened to a sea-going vessel, I suggested, might not Protestantism be compared to a City built upon land, governed not by Captain but by Council?

Would Miss Collins say a word, I asked, concerning G. K.'s political philosophy? She mentioned his term, "Distributism." He had opposed centralization and bureaucracy, had felt that political and economic controls were moving farther and farther from the people. Power, both economic and political, should return to the people, who were, after all, most deeply concerned. The small people should own their own land and their own souls. Government could serve Distributism chiefly by curtailing its own omnipotence, and by guaranteeing to each man his equal share of the soil. Socialism continually moved ownership and control from human beings to hierarchies.

Miss Collins' deepest memory of G. K. was of his child-like humility, his complete selflessness of spirit. I left Top Meadow reluctantly, with renewed love for the great Controversialist, and in prayer. He understood the meaning of Christian love, as few men have understood it, when he said: "At every moment we are wholly dependent upon God. When a man realizes that he can never pay the debt he owes to God, he will be forever trying. He will always be throwing things away into a pit of unfathomable thanks."